Designing Engaging TK Environments: principles and practices

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Welcome!
Memories of your own childhood:

Think about your favorite play space: what elements, attributes, materials, sounds, smells, textures were present in the space?

What was the role of the adult in that space?
Agenda

- Designing with the brain in mind
- Principles of design
- Creating invitations or provocations
Integrated into the content:

- Guidelines for DAP practices
- Strategies for engaging with families
- Inclusive practices (DLLs, Children with special rights)
- Resources
- Frameworks such as: ECERS, TK Implementation guide, NAEYC, CLASS, Etc.
1-Share what you know
2-Step up/step down
3-Ask questions
4-Be open to new ideas
Designing with the brain in mind

What we know about children’s growing brains....
The Philosophical Baby
What Children’s Minds Tell Us About Truth, Love, and the Meaning of Life
Alison Gopnik

The Gardener and the Carpenter
What the New Science of Child Development Tells Us About the Relationship Between Parents and Children
Alison Gopnik
The classrooms we offer:
Issues:

- Cluttered
- Generic
- Institutional
Cluttered environments...

“Multiple stimuli present in the visual field at the same time compete for neural representation by mutually suppressing their evoked activity throughout visual cortex, providing a neural correlate for the limited processing capacity of the visual system.”

From “Interactions of Top-Down and Bottom-Up Mechanisms in Human Visual Cortex” Published by the Journal of Neuroscience
In other words:

When your environment is cluttered, the chaos restricts our ability to focus. The clutter also limits your brain’s ability to process information. Clutter makes us distracted and unable to process information as well as we do in an uncluttered, organized, and serene environments.
Generic environments...

- Unintended consequences of ECERS: standardization of ECE environments
- Lack of representation of the children’s families and communities
- Low aesthetic value
- Disconnect from the natural world
Institutional environments:

- Teachers have less ownership
- Not comfortable, comforting
- Disposable and materialistic mentality
- Driven by the “education” industry
- Not “place based”
Finding the inspiration to change:

- Reggio Emilia
- Margie Carter and Debbie Curtis
- New Zealand
- Beautiful spaces (museums, natural environments, native cultures, etc)
Resource: Designs for Living and Learning by Deb Curtis and Margie Carter
Now compare...
Design Principles
1-Highlight your community

What is unique about your community? How might you include elements of design that will show children and families that you value where they are from and where they live?
EXAMPLE: The Mission
Examples

- Sense of place through pictures
- Sense of place through materials
- Sense of place through children’s books
- Sense of place through exploration
- Sense of place through a caring for animals and plants
- Sense of place through honoring the families and their backgrounds
2-Use color intentionally

Resource: The Complete Book of Color, by Suzi Chiazzari
3- Increase flexibility in the way you use space and materials
4- Create places of refuge

- Important for all learners
- Particularly important for Dual Language Leaners
- Vital for self regulation
“When children feel comfortable in their physical surroundings, they will venture to explore materials or events around them.”

– Anita Rui Olds
Places for adults too!
5-Create Complexity and beauty
6–Integrate learning goals
7- Encourage autonomy
8-Use the children's and families' experiences and knowledge

“Does the environment reflect the culture, traditions, history and identity of the children, families and teachers in the community?”

Transitional Kindergarten Implementation Guide, page 66
Example: what is science?

Re-designing the science area at a Japanese bilingual program in Japan Town, San Francisco.
9- Be intentional about your displays
10- Use real objects
11- Use natural materials
12- Inclusive design

Tips:

- Learn about your families in advance
- Find out more about the children’s competences
- Include images of children and their families
- Think about physical barriers that might impede movement
- Discuss barriers with the children and the families
- If needed, invite experts to support and help
13- Create invitations (provocations)

A provocation is something thoughtfully prepared for the learners. It is designed to encourage exploration. The best provocations tend to respond to children's interests, and to further their thinking.
ACTIVITY

- Look at the provocations available in the classroom.
- What are your reactions to them?
- What learning goals/skills/discoveries do they highlight?
- What design principles do you see represented in them?
Using design principles to change a classroom...
A story of transformation
Remarkable changes

1. Environment
2. Quality of play
3. Transitions
4. Teacher/teacher communication
5. Support for intellectual growth
6. Teachers’ responses
Room before
After
Storage room before
Storage room after
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>BEFORE</strong></th>
<th><strong>After</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chaotic</td>
<td>Peaceful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unfocused</td>
<td>Focused</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sustained</td>
<td>Sustained</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rarely supported by adults</td>
<td>Frequently supported by adults</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little opportunity for small group play</td>
<td>More opportunity for alone time and small group play</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
RESOURCES

- Designs for Living and Learning (Deb Curtis & Margie Carter)
- Learning Together With Children (Deb Curtis & Margie Carter)
- The Complete Book of Color, by Suzi Chiazzari
- Caring Spaces, Learning Places (by Jim Greenman)
- Beautiful Stuff (by C. Topal and Lella Gandini)
- Natural Playscapes (by Rusty Keeler)
- A Child’s Garden (by Molly Dannenmaier)
- Asphalt to Ecosystems (by Sharon Danks)

https://www.pinterest.com/1st5sf/